



Using Case Conceptualization to Optimize DBT for Neurodiverse Clients

Lorie Ritschel, PhD & Sami Ascanio, LCSW-C

Dates: January 31, 2025

Time: 10:00am-5:30pm Eastern Standard Time

Cost: \$395 (early bird - by 7/5/24), \$450 (standard rate)

Location: virtual (recording will be available after the live training)

Continuing education credits available for those attending the live event only.

Program Description:

Many mental health professionals are not adequately trained to assess autism or to work with autistic individuals. Perhaps even more concerning, many clinicians are unaware of their own knowledge gaps, which may lead to a failure to recognize neurodiversity in their clients. From a medical model standpoint, autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that manifests as a combination of social skills deficits and restricted/repetitive behaviors. From a social model of disability standpoint, autism is a neurotype to be understood but is only a “disorder” in that it ranges from difficult to nigh impossible to be an autistic person in a world created and largely maintained by allistic (non-autistic) individuals. As such, autistic individuals must exist daily in what is potentially a chronically invalidating environment.

Mental health difficulties (e.g., anxiety, depression, ADHD, PTSD) occur at a significantly higher rate in autistic individuals than in the general population. In addition, rates of suicidal and self-harming behavior are more than three times higher in autistic individuals than allistic individuals. Moreover, autistic clients report a number of barriers to accessing effective, neuroaffirmative treatments for these difficulties. On the one hand, they are often told that providers “don’t work with” autistic individuals; on the other, concealing their autism diagnosis to overcome this barrier can result in ineffective treatment, as the client’s neurotype was not properly assessed and incorporated into the treatment plan.

Preliminary research has demonstrated that DBT can be safe and effective in reducing suicidal behaviors in autistic adults without intellectual disability. In qualitative studies, autistic adults have reported that DBT skills are helpful for regulating emotions, understanding themselves, and connecting with others. In addition, these clients have suggested several modifications that could enhance DBT’s accessibility, effectiveness, or generalizability for autistic individuals. Suggestions have included reducing the number of words on handouts and worksheets, incorporating more concrete practices

and visual supports, and more explicitly addressing how DBT skills may apply to neurodiverse clients.

In this workshop, the presenters (one of whom is autistic) will discuss characteristics of autism that clinicians should consider (e.g., autistic learning styles, sensory profiles). Implications for treatment will be discussed, with a focus on incorporating the client's neurotype into case conceptualization. Potential modifications for both individual therapy and skills delivery will be discussed.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. List 2 autism-specific concepts to consider during case conceptualization with autistic individuals
2. Identify 8 sensory areas that should be assessed with neurodiverse clients
3. Describe 2 or more ways to modify DBT skills training/delivery to be more neurodiversity-affirming
4. List 3 or more potential accommodations that could be made to reduce sensory overwhelm in autistic clients
5. Describe how a neurotypical environment can be pervasively invalidating for an autistic individual List 2 autism-specific concepts to consider during case conceptualization with autistic individuals
6. Identify 8 sensory areas that should be assessed with neurodiverse clients
7. Describe 2 or more ways to modify DBT skills training/delivery to be more neurodiversity-affirming
8. List 3 or more potential accommodations that could be made to reduce sensory overwhelm in autistic clients
9. Describe how a neurotypical environment can be pervasively invalidating for an autistic individual

Target Audience

This webinar is designed for mental health professionals and trainees who have some familiarity with DBT and are interested in expanding their understanding of neurodiversity-affirmative care. Please note the following:

(1) We will not be covering the basic DBT strategies and framework; rather, this training will focus on how to apply DBT principles when working with neurodiverse individuals.

(2) We will focus on what is known in DSM5 as Level 1 autism without intellectual disability.

Schedule (all times eastern)

DAY 1	
9:30a - 10:00a	Log-on and Sign-in
10:00a -11:15a	Understanding autism as a neurotype
11:15a - 11:30a	Break
11:30a - 1:00p	Neurodiversity affirming case conceptualization
1:00p - 2:00p	Lunch
2:00p - 3:00p	DBT skills training and delivery with neurodiverse clients
3:00p - 3:15p	Break
3:15p - 5:00p	Individual therapy with neurodiverse clients
5:00p - 5:30p	5:00-5:05 stretch break 5:05-5:30 Q&A, Completion of evaluation

Trainers

Lorie Ritschel, PhD

Lorie Ritschel earned her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the University of Kansas and completed postdoctoral fellowships at Duke University Medical Center and Emory University School of Medicine. Dr. Ritschel is an expert trainer and consultant of DBT and the DBT Prolonged Exposure protocol through Behavioral Tech and Harned Consulting. She is a board certified DBT therapist through the DBT-Linehan Board of Certification. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine, where she collaborates with the TEACCH Autism program to adapt DBT for autistic individuals. She has published and presented her work in numerous national and international venues. Dr. Ritschel is also a co-owner of the Triangle Area Psychology Clinic (TAP), an outpatient private practice in Durham, NC, where she and her colleagues treat adolescents, adults, couples and families using a range of evidence-based treatments.

Sami Ascanio, LCSW

Sami Ascanio, LCSW-C, is an Autistic clinician in the Greater Washington DC area, serving as the Program Director of a prominent DBT Clinic. She is certified as a DBT clinician by the DBT-Linehan Board of Certification and leads the DBT-LBC Certified DBT program at Capital Youth Services. Sami specializes in treating Autistic adolescents, utilizing her unique cognitive processing and organizational skills to

emphasize the importance of considering neurotype during assessment, case conceptualization, and treatment.

Conflicts of Interest

Both trainers are employees of the TAP Clinic and receive payment for training and clinical services provided as part of their employment.

Registration and Payment

Registration and payment for the webinar can be completed via [Eventbrite](#). Registration fees are non-refundable. CE fees are fully refundable up to 7 days before the event. Cancellations received between 6 and 3 days before the event are entitled to a 50% refund. Cancellations 2 or less days before the event will not be eligible for a refund.

Registration Fees (covers cost of webinar and electronic copies of materials):

\$395 (early bird rate - register by 11/30/24)

\$450 (standard rate - register by 1/30/25)

Continuing Education Credits (optional): \$40 per person

Continuing Education (CE) Information

Six (6) CE credits are being offered for this workshop for those who attend the event in full. TAP is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. TAP maintains responsibility for this program and its content. Participants who miss more than 15 minutes of the training will not be eligible for CEs - partial CE credits will not be given. Participants are required to sign in online at the beginning and conclusion of the course and participate fully in the course, Q&A and any assessments given by the presenters.

Questions about the CE credits for this event can be directed to tapce@tapclinicnc.com.

Other Important Information:

1. Links cannot be shared and are only active for the participant who registered.
2. Please make sure the email you use to register is the email address in which you would like to receive your certificate.

References:

1. Bemmouna, D., Coutelle, R., Weibel, S., & Weiner, L. (2022). Feasibility, acceptability and preliminary efficacy of dialectical behavior therapy for autistic adults without intellectual disability: a mixed methods study. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 52(10), 4337-4354.

2. Blanchard, A., Chihuri, S., DiGiuseppi, C. G., & Li, G. (2021). Risk of Self-harm in Children and Adults With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA network open*, 4(10), e2130272. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.30272>
3. Hartman, D., O'Donnell-Killen, T., Doyle, J. K., Kavanagh, M., Day, A., & Azevedo, J. (2023). *The adult autism assessment handbook: A neurodiversity affirmative approach*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
4. Henderson, D., Wayland, S., & White, J. (2024). *Is This Autism? A Guide for Clinicians and Everyone Else*. New York: Routledge.
5. Huntjens, A., van den Bosch, L. W., Sizoo, B., Kerkhof, A., Smit, F., & van der Gaag, M. (2024). The effectiveness and safety of dialectical behavior therapy for suicidal ideation and behavior in autistic adults: a pragmatic randomized controlled trial. *Psychological medicine*, 1-12.
6. Keenan, E. G., Gurba, A. N., Mahaffey, B., Kappenberg, C. F., & Lerner, M. D. (2024). Leveling up dialectical behavior therapy for autistic individuals with emotion dysregulation: clinical and personal insights. *Autism in Adulthood*, 6(1), 1-8.
7. Kiernan, B. W., LaPoint, S. C., Ritschel, L., Guy, L., Oliver-Derry, K., Stahl, S., Maddox, B. B. (2023, November 16) *A Thematic Analysis of Autistic Adults' and Clinicians' Perceived Value of Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training* [Poster presentation]. ISITDBT Conference Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA.
8. Maddox, B. B., & Gaus, V. L. (2019). Community mental health services for autistic adults: Good news and bad news. *Autism in Adulthood*, 1(1), 15-19. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2018.0006>
9. Price, D. (2022). *Unmasking autism: Discovering the new faces of neurodiversity*. Harmony.
10. Ritschel, L.A., Guy, L., & Maddox, B.B. (2022). A pilot study of Dialectical Behavior Therapy skills training for autistic adults. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 50(2), 187-202. doi: 10.1017/S1352465821000370